

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 December 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: Holders of Memorandum for the Director
(26 December 1961)

SUBJECT : The Consequences of a Failure of Negotiations
Among the Three Princes

The attached memorandum replaces memorandum for the Director,
"The Consequences of a Failure of Negotiations Among the Three
Princes" dated 26 December 1961. It is requested that the
original memorandum be destroyed.

CHESTER L. COOPER *12/15*
Deputy Assistant Director
National Estimates

25X1

25X1

~~SECRET~~

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 December 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Consequences of a Failure of Negotiations
Among the Three Princes

1. There is a very good chance that the meetings among the three Laotian Princes scheduled to begin on 27 December in Vientiane will fail to produce agreement on the formation of a new government. The practical issues to be negotiated are difficult ones, and the situation is complicated by delicate considerations of pride, protocol, and personal sensitivities among the three principals. Moreover, the areas of real agreement among them are very limited, and their basic long-term objectives are contradictory. The negotiations are likely to be suspended on one or more occasions. Disruptions and delays, punctuated by charges and countercharges, could stretch out the negotiations for several weeks, or perhaps even longer.

~~SECRET~~

2. We anticipate that some increase in military activity will accompany these temporary disruptions of the negotiations as either or both sides seek to place greater pressure on the other. However, if the breakdown appeared to be so fundamental as to remove the present basis for negotiation, we believe the antigovernment forces would undertake fairly substantial military operations in an effort to force the resumption of negotiations on terms favorable to them. We continue to believe that the Communists regard their prospects as excellent for achieving their immediate objectives in Laos -- a neutralist coalition government -- primarily by negotiation and political action and not by military conquest.

3. As for the scale of their military operations following a breakdown in negotiations, we believe that the antigovernment forces would not be likely to launch a drive for a quick military victory over the government. Throughout their campaign in Laos the Kong Le and Pathet Lao forces have pursued limited military objectives. We believe that the Communists have placed restraints on the level of their military action in order to reduce the risks of direct US military intervention. The Communists probably still believe that a major military campaign to seize

~~SECRET~~

the Mekong towns under government control would involve considerable risk of direct US military intervention and that such a risk is unnecessary to the ultimate achievement of their ends in Laos.

4. General Phoumi would prefer a resumption of military action to negotiations. In hopes of creating a situation in which the US might come to his aid, General Phoumi might attempt to implement standing plans for a general offensive against the antigovernment stronghold in the Plaine des Jarres and Xieng Khouang area. Phoumi's forces alone could not retake this area or withstand the counterattack which such an attack would probably stimulate. Phoumi and Boun Oun also have contingency plans for withdrawal to southern Laos. If their military or political position in the Vientiane and Luang Prabang area weakened significantly they might attempt to consolidate their forces in the south. However, southern Laos is heavily subverted by the Communists, and the eastern portion is already under firm enemy control. Without major external assistance Phoumi probably could not hold out for long.

- 3 -

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

5. The military capabilities of both the government and antigovernment forces have been improved since the cease-fire last May. The Laotian Government forces have had considerable training and have received a continued influx of US arms and equipment. The Kong Le and Pathet Lao forces have improved their military deployment, increased their strength, re-outfitted many of their troops, and stockpiled equipment and supplies.* They have also added to their artillery, antiaircraft, and armored car strength. We continue to believe that the antigovernment forces presently in Laos have the capability to capture in a short time any of the major towns along the Mekong River remaining in the hands of the Laotian Government. They have had this capability since the cease-fire and, in our view, have made greater improvements in their military situation

* Present estimates of troop strengths in Laos are:

Royal Laotian Government		Antigovernment forces	
Army	38,487	Pathet Lao	15,900
ADC	13,800	Kong Le forces	12,000
Meo	11,000	North Vietnamese	3,200
	<u>63,287</u>		<u>31,100</u>

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

than have the government forces during the intervening nine months. It is possible that the Communists will seize the occasion of a breakdown in negotiations as an opportunity to utilize this capability. We continue to believe, however, that they will not go this far for the reasons stated above.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



25X1

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

~~SECRET~~